

We are the Temple of the Living God

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

INTRO

It's Super Bowl Sunday! I said it. I want us to think about it quickly so we don't think about it during the rest of the message! The Super Bowl is fun, it's excitement, it is the world's biggest stage. If you were fortunate enough to have tickets, you would be entering a giant Temple, of sorts. Everything focused on the event at hand. The pigskin almost worshipped in the all-out wonder of the moment.

By contrast, coming to church this morning seems old-hat: same-old, same-old. For some of us, we have been going to Church every week our entire lives. How can Sunday morning match the glory and grandeur of the Super Bowl? And closer to home, how can our wonder and enjoyment of Jesus at Church ever compare to the strong pull and power of the Super Bowl over our affections?

Today I want us to consider some grand things about our Church, about all true Christian churches. Perhaps after we have seen the text this morning, we will become more enamored with what God is doing here than with any grand sports competition or other wonder.

Turn with me now to 2 Corinthians 6, but before we begin, let's pray.

I. The People of the Temple

A. **Quick Look** at 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1.

1. 1st Command = "Do Not Be Unequally Yoked" [Be Separate]

2. Why? = You are separate, distinct
 - (You are) Righteousness
 - (You are) Light
 - (You are) [of] Christ
 - (You are) a believer
 - (You are) the temple of God
3. 2nd Command = "Cleanse ourselves from every defilement" [Be Holy]
4. Why? = "[You] have [all] these promises" [you are holy]
 - This goes all the way back to 1:20, but
 - Particularly focuses on the promises in v. 16-18 relating to our being the "temple of the Living God."
5. In short, we are commanded to be what we are.
 - Be separate, because you are separate (as God's people).
 - Be holy, because you are holy (as God's temple).
6. So, it is the Corinthians, with Paul included in the "we" who are "the people of the temple."
 - It is the Church who is the Temple of God.
 - Not just "like" the Temple of God, but the Church *is* the Temple of God (just as much as we are believers, and are righteous - vs. 14-16).

B. Testing our Identification of the Church as the Temple (does this fit with other Scripture?)

1. **1 Cor. 3:16** - "you [plural] are God's temple and... God's Spirit dwells in you"
2. **Eph. 2:18-22** - Gentiles and Jews alike grow "into a holy temple in the Lord" and are "being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."
3. **1 Peter 2:4-5** - Jesus is a "living stone" that is "chosen and precious," and "you yourselves like living stones are being

built up as a spiritual house... a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices...”

4. **We are the Body of Christ, Who is the True Temple.**

- Jn. 2:19-21 – “Destroy this temple and in 3 days I will raise it up... but he was speaking about the temple of his body....”
- Jn. 1:14 – “the Word... [tabernacled] among us” and housed the true Shekinah glory.

C. Conclusion: The body of Christ, the Church, is in some way “The Temple of the Living God.” But what exactly does this mean?

II. **God’s Presence in the Temple**

- The word for “temple” in 2 Cor. 6 is *naos* (refers to the Holy of Holies, or sacred space itself). Using this instead of the generic word for temple (*hieron*) highlights God’s presence as the Temple’s focus.

A. The Function of a Temple

1. What do you think of when think of a Temple?
 - Gold, Silk, Fineries – fit for a king or a God
 - Incense, candles – to create sacred space fit for God
 - Prayer, worship, singing, praise – to invoke the Deity
 - Sacrifices, dedications – to get God’s favor
 - Priests and temple-guards, custodians – to protect the space and to serve the Deity
2. In short everything in a Temple is revolves around bringing God’s presence into our midst. It is a sacred space where man can hopefully meet and commune with God.

B. The Filling of the Tabernacle & First Temple

1. In the OT, this is exactly what God did with first the Tabernacle, and then the Temple. He graciously filled it with his presence.

2. Read **2 Chron. 5:11, 13b-14, 6:1-2, 12, 14, 18-19, 40-7:3.**
3. This dedication of the Temple and the start of Solomon’s reign, is the high-water mark of the OT. And it highlights how central the Temple theme – God dwelling with man – is to the entire Bible.

C. The Fervor for the Temple

1. What would we do, if we knew there was a place where the very God of Gods actually dwelled? Maybe we would speak like this:
 - “How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.... For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.” (Ps. 84:1-2,10)
2. In addition to these expressions of heart-felt longing for the Lord’s presence, the people of Israel had:
 - yearly festivals at the Temple
 - made pilgrimages to it
 - prayed toward it
 - lamented its loss in their captivity
 - And wept over its lost glory (the second Temple never matched the splendor and never had the indwelling presence that the first Temple did)

D. The Presence of God in the Temple truly was glorious, but how does this relate to us in our present situation in this church?

III. **The Promises of the Temple**

- To help us truly appreciate how the Temple in the OT relates to us in the New, let us look at the promises relating to the Temple, some of them mentioned in our text – 2 Cor. 6.

A. “God with Us” – the first quote in 2 Cor. 6 combines Lev.

26:11-12 and Ezek. 37:27

- *I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people. (Lev. 26:11-12)*
- *My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Ezek. 37:27)*
- This promise that God will be our God, and we his people, and that God’s dwelling would be among us is made no less than 28 times in the Bible.
 - (1) **Gen. 17:7** - *I will establish my covenant... to be God to you and to your offspring after you.* [Abrahamic Covenant]
 - (2) **Ex. 29:45** - *I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God.* [Mosaic Covenant]
 - (3) **2 Sam. 7:24** – *You established... Israel to be your people forever. And you, O LORD, became their God.* [Davidic Covenant]
 - (4) **Jer. 31:33** - *And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.* [New Covenant]
- The essence of this promise was realized with Jesus, Emmanuel (God – with – us), Jesus “the Word” who “dwelt among us”, and we saw his Glory (Jn. 1:14).
- This same promise is given to the church in **2 Cor. 6:16**
- And it is ultimately fulfilled in **Rev. 21:3** *Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.* [the consummation of all Covenants]

B. The Messiah and His Temple

- It is prophesied that the Messiah will build a Temple
 - In 2 Sam. 7 which we read. Solomon built the temple, but Solomon’s throne is not established forever, so it is the

one Greater than Solomon who ultimately must build the house for God’s name -- (a house that God would dwell in forever, 1 Kings 8:13)

– Zech. 6:12 *“the man whose name is the Branch... will build the temple of the Lord.”*

- What temple did Jesus (the Messiah) build? There is no Temple in the New Jerusalem.
- In Matt. 16:18, Jesus built something... he said “I will build my church” – and as we have seen, the church is a Temple. And Eph. 2:20-21 says *“Christ Jesus himself [is] the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.”*

C. Royal Priesthood – time fails us, but the nation of Israel was called a “kingdom of priests,” and a “holy nation” that is God’s “treasured possession” (Exod. 19:5-6), and in 1 Peter the church is likewise called a “royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.” (1 Pet. 2:9). And in Rev. 5, the 24 elders say to the Lamb *“you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God.”* (5:9-10).

D. The promises of the Temple do indeed seem to find fulfillment in the Church in some sense. But how, should these promises, and this reality of our being God’s temple, shape our lives here and now?

IV. The Purpose of God’s Temple-People

A. A “Company of Priests”.

1. I know we’ve covered a lot of ground in a short amount of time. So let’s stop and picture this. You and I, we all are priests.

2. We have an incredibly important and significant job – We are serving in God’s temple, and we are actually being built up as part of it!
3. Like the saints of old felt privileged when they ascended the Temple steps and were in the courts of praise, we have an even more mind-numbing position as being the very habitation of God’s Spirit, corporately and individually!
4. We are a company of priests on a mission for Christ’s Kingdom. We are extending the presence of God, the knowledge of God, and ultimately the glory of God to the ends of the earth.
5. We are imaging God, whether we want to or not, when people want to find God or see him, they have to look at us. We’re His Temple, and that’s where people will find God.

B. This brings sober **Obligations** on our part. (But “obligations” is probably the wrong word, we should say “**privileges**”!)

1. **Worship** – Heb. 12:28-29 (*Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.* **remember Nadab, Abihu)
2. **Purity** – going back to our 2 Cor. 6 text, we must “*cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit*” picture the Laver here, and “[*bring*] holiness to completion in the fear of God.”
3. **Sacrifice**
 - singing of praise (Heb. 13:15)
 - doing good and sharing our possessions (Heb. 13:16, Micah 6:6-8)
 - giving of gifts to enable spread of the gospel (Phil. 4:18)
 - confession of sin, penitence of heart (Ps. 51:17)

- steadfast love/covenant loyalty & a knowledge of God (Hos. 6:6)
- offering our very bodies to God for spiritual service (Rom. 12:1)

4. **Prayer (Incense)** (Ps. 141:2 “*Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!*” Rev. 5:8 “*the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.*”)

5. **Witness**

- Church is pictured by lampstands in Revelation, spreading God’s light abroad (see Matt. 5:14-16, too).
- Paul saw his work of taking the Gospel to the Gentiles as a sacrificial service too (Rom. 15:16 *to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.*)

6. **Communion** as the One Feast of the New Temple. I can’t leave this out, as we’ll be experiencing this shortly! (Heb. 13:10 “*we have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat*” may indicate this. But ultimately it is about feasting on Christ – spiritually (as John 6 teaches). We get to enjoy the benefits of Christ’s GREAT SACRIFICE. We feast on His body and blood, spiritually, and this is what sustains us – this is our one **true feast**.

C. Ultimately, and by God’s grace, we come to be the **adornment of God’s Temple**.

- 1) Luke 21:5 “*And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said,*” – we (the Church) are “living stones” (1 Pet. 2:5), and our lives are “living offerings” (Rom. 12:1) that adorn God’s living Temple.

2) Rev. 3:12 promises that *“the one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it...”* This reminds us that, we will experience an even greater sense of being God’s Temple one day. We are already living in God’s presence in His temple, but one day we will know *so much more* of His presence. The end-times Temple is **already** here, but it’s **not yet** here in the glory and splendor with which it will ultimately shine. (Rev. 21:3, 7, 22).

D. This look at our obligations as priests in God’s Temple, helps us see **the purpose God has for his Church here as his Living Temple**. *But how can we ever live up to such an awesome and unbelievably high calling?*

V. **Power** for Temple-Living

A. **Recognize who we ARE.**

1. (Be separate and holy, because we are separated and holy to the Lord – we are the Temple of the Living God.
2. Knowing what we ARE, gives us motivation and cause to “become” who God has promised we are.

B. **Believe God’s Promises** – 2 Cor. 7:1, *“since we have these promises...”* (2 Pet. 1:3-4 – *“great and precious promises... that through them, we might become partakers of the divine nature”*)

C. **Gaze on Christ’s Glory** through His Word, and in His Temple-People around us.

1. 2 Cor. 3:18 *“we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.”*
2. 1 Pet. 2:4-5, *“as you come to him (the cornerstone)... you yourselves... are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*

CONCLUSION

I hope this vision of God’s Temple, and our participation in this great theme of God being God for His people and setting His dwelling place among them, will inspire you. I hope it adds great significance to what often can seem mundane and routine. When we meet together, Jesus Christ is with us. God the Holy Spirit indwells us corporately as a church, and individually as Christians. The struggles to keep believing, to keep fighting the flesh, to keep struggling against sin, to keep waking up and not checking out on life, the sorrows, the heartaches, all of that is worth it! We are a company of priests, we are carrying special golden bowls full of incense, as we pray. We are living lives that are a fragrant and sweet smell to our Heavenly Father. And we do this more easily, and more sweetly, the closer we are to Christ, and the more we “draw near” to Him in prayer and in fellowship and Bible reading. May God give us eyes to see how greatly He has blessed us in that we are the body of Christ Jesus His Son, and we are also the one True Temple of God on earth in this age. May the Glory of the Lord cover the earth as the waters cover the sea!

BENEDICTION

1 Chronicles 29:16, 18-19 *“O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own... O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of your people, and direct their hearts toward you. Grant to Solomon my son a whole heart that he may keep your commandments, your testimonies, and your statutes, performing all, and that he may build the palace for which I have made provision.”*